



February 21, 2017

Testimony to Appropriations Committee

Amy Waterman, Middletown Family Resource Centers and the CT Family Resource Center Alliance

Good evening Chairs of the Appropriation Committee Senators Ostend and Formica and Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Amy Waterman from the Middletown Family Resource Centers speaking on behalf of the Connecticut Family Resource Center Alliance. The FRC Alliance works to promote and strengthen 74 state-funded Family Resource Centers (FRCs) located in 42 school districts throughout the state. The FRC model provides access, within a community, to a broad continuum of early childhood and family support services which foster the optimal development of children and their families.

The Governor's current proposed Education budget has cut FRC funds in half and reallocated them to a competitive block grant. **We are urging you to reject the Governor's proposal to consolidate funds into a block grant; instead we strongly recommend that you maintain a line item in the State Department of Education's budget for Family Resource Centers and to keep our current funding level of which is presently at \$8,051,914**

Every FRC operates in a system of partnerships between the school and other community resources to promote the development of a shared vision across community, agencies and services. Each is developed based on a local needs assessment to support comprehensive educational reform where parents are engaged as full partners. For this reason, the core services delivered by a FRC may differ from site to site, giving the FRCs the ability to ensure services are not duplicated and important screening and early intervention services are not missed.

In addition to doing a lot with modest funding, the FRC's also leverage available funding available from other funding sources including United Way, School Readiness dollars, Care4Kids, Graustein Memorial Fund, Federal PIP grants, funding from Boards of Education, and other philanthropic or local funding.

FRC's employ the Parents As Teachers curriculum which provides home visitation through the nationally-recognized, evidence-based Parents as Teachers model which uses research-based, evidence informed curricula. PAT is the only universal access, evidence-based model in Connecticut providing home visiting services to all families. The curricula support a parent's role in promoting school readiness and healthy development of children. The approach is intimate and relationship-based. The program embraces learning experiences that are relevant and customized for the individual needs of each family and child.

PAT Outcomes include:

- improved language and literacy for young and school age children

- increased entire family engagement in children's learning and engagement with their schools,
- increased school achievement for children
- reductions in the achievement gap for low income children at kindergarten entry
- identification and treatment of developmental delays well before the K-12 years
- improved parenting knowledge and skills
- reduced child maltreatment
- increased family self-sufficiency
- child health outcome, such as:
 - increased child immunization rates
 - lower body mass index rates
 - higher birth weights
 - improved family well-being
 - increased family health literacy

One of the most vital services FRCs provide are developmental and social/emotional screenings beginning with children as early as 4 months old. Using the Ages & Stages Child Development and Social Emotional screenings, referrals can be made to our CT Birth-3 system up until age 3, and with the schools support services after the age of 3. These screenings are key for identifying issues at a very early age and providing a continuum of support for the child and the parent.

FRC's are part of the Two Generational Pilot program with a focus on work force development for the parent and school readiness for the child. It places families at the center of the coordinated work between agencies to ensure that the whole family's interests and needs are addressed. This is work the FRC's have been doing since the late 80s'.

In addition to home visitation, Family Resource Centers provide or collaborate with other agencies intergenerational literacy programs, before and after school childcare, school readiness preschool, adult education, parenting classes including Circle of Security Parenting, Conscious Discipline, Raising Readers, parent/child interactive play & learn groups (play with a purpose), support and training for Home Daycare Providers, and positive youth development school events and programs.

Family Resource Centers are strategically located within school buildings which allow FRC staff to align programming to support student achievement efforts by ensuring parental involvement, working to reduce chronic absenteeism rates, and improving family learning initiatives. Enhancing the family-school connection assists parents in becoming successful partners in their children's education.

On behalf of Connecticut families and children, I would like to thank the State for the almost 30 years of continued support given to the Family Resource Centers.

In closing, I would like to share just one of our many success stories:

This story is about a 25 year old Hispanic mother of four. When we first met her, her two boys, were ages 2 and 11, and her two girls were ages 6 and 9. She originally came to the FRC seeking housing resources. She had been living in shelters for the past four years and had a history of domestic violence and mental illness. The FRC staff helped her find a home and one month later the school age children were enrolled at the elementary school in town with a FRC. Mom started coming regularly to the FRC attending Play & Learn groups with her toddler. She

enrolled in Parents As Teachers and received weekly home visits based on the needs she identified. After completing an ASQ for the toddler, a referral was made to Birth to 3 due to some low cognitive and behavioral scores. The Birth to 3 evaluation confirmed that the child needed services. Birth to 3 met with the family weekly and our own FRC Parent Educator worked with the family on the same goals as Birth to 3 both at home and during weekly Play and Learn groups. Mom created some of her own goals and began to work on accomplishing those goals. For example, she worked on updating her resume and has found steady work. She hopes to return to school and further education to become a licensed beautician, and get work that will eventually pay more than minimum wage.

Through collaboration and communication between the FRC staff and the teachers of the two school age children a referral was made to the Community Health Center's School Based Health Center for both medical and behavioral health to help with some tough behaviors being exhibited in the classrooms. Our Parent Educator was able to help mom to implement strategies at home. Because both children were delayed in reading, they were enrolled in the "PAWS and Read Group" through one of our FRC's youth development groups to provide safe reading opportunities with a therapy dog named Juno. Both children loved the group and became more confident in their reading. As the older children became more settled, they were enrolled in an afterschool program focusing on the Arts. The eldest son is now enrolled in the local Upward Bound program. He will be the first in his family to attend college if he continues on this trajectory. In addition to the Play and Learn Groups, mom also joined other FRC Parenting Programs such as FIT Families where families learn healthy habits, proper nutrition and exercise. She attended the Circle of Security Parenting 8 week class and actively participated in the FRC's weekly Parents in Action group which gives parents the opportunity to volunteer in the school and help out in their children's classrooms. The children have expressed that they love that their mom spends so much time in their school. Teachers have expressed how much they appreciate having access to Mom on a regular basis to ensure academics and behavior do not slip. This is a family who has had many different obstacles to overcome but they have come so far and continue to make improvements in their well-being.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. Thank you and have a wonderful evening,

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